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Handel speaks to Buckhead Business Association

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Karen Handel

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Georgia Secretary of State and GOP governor hopeful Karen Handel last week updated local executives on topics including the U.S. Supreme Court upholding the voter ID law, a judgment returning \$3.2 billion to fraud victims, and reducing her office's 2009 budget by 15 percent to \$30.5 million.

"That is not a crisis-driven reduction. These are real, ongoing reductions that are not going to be asked for back in the future," Ms. Handel said about line items like \$211,925 in operating expenses at the Georgia Archives.

Ms. Handel spoke to the Buckhead Business Association at the City Club of Buckhead June 25, introduced by association president-elect Heather Wright.

"Her duties include overseeing elections, corporations, securities, professional licensing boards and the anti-fraud investigative unit that she formed in her first month in office," Ms. Wright said.

Ms. Handel added a lesser-known role.

"I am also Georgia's boxing commissioner," she said, "which comes in handy from time to time at the capitol."

In the corporations arena, Ms. Handel said Georgia's economic development approach needs a twofold strategy to compete against

other states.

"As we focus on recruiting large companies, we cannot lose sight of two other things: one, doing what we need to do at the state to retain the large companies that we currently have, and two, small business," she said to an audience of about 85 members of the association, half of whom run small businesses. "A lot of you know this, but 95 percent of Georgia's corporate base has 50 or fewer employees. We at the state have not done enough to support and bolster small business."

Ms. Handel touched on her campaign for governor several times, including answering questions on transportation from an audience that included Atlanta mayoral candidate Glenn Thomas.

Ms. Handel is facing Insurance Commissioner John Oxendine, District 9 U.S. Rep. Nathan Deal and others for the GOP nomination for governor in the 2010 race.

"The next mayor of Atlanta and the next governor are going to have to be real advocates around this issue," she said. "I'm not saying do anything to undermine the success of one community or another. I'm saying let's understand that we are symbiotic and not be adversarial."

George H. Bergmark III, a member of the Sandy Springs Perimeter Chamber of Commerce board of directors and a small business owner, said afterward he was impressed by Ms. Handel.

"I think she's got clearly articulated, good ideas," the Sandy Springs resident said. "She's not dodging questions."

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